Dennis Corrington was led to a career in recreation by his enduring love of sports. With an intent to coach high school football, he attended Morningside College and majored in Physical Education. However, this path shifted when Corrington enrolled in graduate school at Iowa State University to conduct a research study with the Director of Intramurals by collecting statistics on football-related injuries. During this study, he attended the National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA) conference, not knowing that this would be his first of 50 conferences.

“I was paid enough to travel to Los Angeles to attend the national conference. We presented on the studies we had conducted on football-related injuries,” Corrington said.

At the conference, Corrington was recruited by the University of Texas to become a Graduate Assistant, where he oversaw the intramural program. After advancing to the Assistant Director position at the University of Texas at Austin, Corrington traded in his burnt orange for maroon and accepted the Texas A&M University Director of Intramurals position in 1973.

“The way that Carl Landis, the Director of Health and Physical Education at the time, told me I had the job was by saying I’d like to introduce you to your Assistant Director,” Corrington said. “I didn’t even know where [College Station] was; I had to find it on a map.”

Corrington transitioned into an intramural program that was comprised of only four staff members and was located at the DeWare field house, Texas A&M’s former intramural sports facility. Both the university and the program were going through a period of growth and change with increased diversity and the introduction of co-ed sports.

“Things were changing rapidly in the 1970s because of the initiatives with Earl Rudder. In the intramural program, we went from 70 teams one year to 150 the next year, then to 190, and then to over 200 teams. If I had predicted a 50% increase in the number of teams, the approval committee would have said ‘no way,’” Corrington said.
To keep up with the growth of the university, Corrington initiated key changes to the intramural program, including developing designated recreation facilities and creating the Sport Clubs program in 1974. Corrington recognized the need for a central recreation facility on campus, leading to the hallmark change of his tenure with Texas A&M Rec Sports: the development of the Student Recreation Center.

“The first year the Rec Center was open, we had 1,250,000 people go through the turnstiles. This building was the biggest change,” Corrington said. “The university was growing by leaps and bounds in the ‘70s and ‘80s, and the university was doing a good job at keeping up with the demand for recreation. It wasn’t until 1987 that it became apparent to others than myself that we needed a central recreational facility, and we had a student vote.”

As Corrington was making this huge impact at Texas A&M, he was also a key member of NIRSA, attending every conference since 1969 and serving in executive leadership roles. He began his leadership in NIRSA as the State Director for Texas before being elected Vice President of NIRSA Region IV in 1979, and President of NIRSA in 1992. Corrington was an integral member of the fundraising efforts for NIRSA, serving as the director of the NIRSA directory and exhibit hall. This strong and continuous commitment was formally recognized when Corrington received the NIRSA Honor Award, the highest award given in the organization.

“Dennis’ leadership in NIRSA was always rooted in our values of inclusion and respect. Not only was Dennis able to create and sustain outstanding recreational facilities, programs, and student development experiences at Texas A&M, he always shared that knowledge with his peers,” NIRSA Executive Director Pam Watts said.

In his involvement with both NIRSA and Texas A&M Rec Sports, Dennis proved to be a visionary, always working toward a better future for the organization he was serving. As his time with Rec Sports comes to a close, Corrington is maintaining this futuristic thinking as he helps position Rec Sports to be a leader in university recreation for years to come.
“If you have an open mind, you’ll be able to have a vision. You have to have an open mind, be able to listen, and be able to contemplate different choices,” Corrington said. “Continuing to push wellness and teach students how to be healthy in more ways than just physically is really where we’re headed.”

As Corrington moves into a retirement filled with time spent on the golf course and with his grandchildren, he will be remembered as a leader focused on moving forward and pushing the program to be the best it could be. His leadership has positioned Texas A&M Rec Sports as the nation’s premier university recreation program, and he will be sorely missed by the community that he has tirelessly shaped for the past 45 years. The legacy Dennis leaves is not only memorialized by the impact he has had on recreational sports, but also through the Dennis Corrington Recreational Sports Leadership Scholarship. This scholarship will be awarded to outstanding student employees who embody the leadership and dedication to Rec Sports and Texas A&M shown by Dennis.

“His mentorship and visionary thinking has brought together a group of professionals that are not only co-workers, but are a part of the Rec Sports family,” Director of Development James Welford said. “Dennis has been a mentor and friend and has the passion to provide every student with access to programs that promote a healthy living lifestyle. He did this well before terms like wellness became popular. His ability to empower his staff to do their jobs and then support their decisions is one of the numerous reasons many staff have stayed at Rec Sports throughout the years.”